

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament 2006 Closing Press Release

Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament
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Anglers Earn More Than 5290 Citations in 2006

Anglers registered 5296 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 49th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, which ran from January 1st through December 31st. This is a slight decrease from 2005, but was the eighth highest total in Tournament history. The top four years in Tournament history occurred from 2001-2004.

Striped bass accounted for the largest number of Citations among the 34 eligible species. The 1098 striped bass awards was the largest in the program's history and represented 21% of all Citations earned last year. Striper success was propelled by good ocean fishing in January and February due to the mild winter and fantastic fishing in the Chesapeake Bay off Cape Charles and at the High Level Bridge of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel in December. In fact, more than 700 Citations were earned during the month of December.

Anglers continued to enjoy a great opportunity to join the "Fifty Pound Club". Seventy-four striped bass weighing 50 pounds or more were registered, the highest in Tournament history. The previous best occurred in 2005 with 51 fish weighing at least 50 pounds.

Summer flounder accounted for the second number of Citations. The 895 flounder Citations was the fifth highest number of Citations issued for the species in the program's history and the second largest number since the Citation minimum was increased to 7 pounds. They represented 17% of all Citation awards earned last year. The recent surge in numbers of truly large fish continued with 78 flounder weighing 10 pounds or more, the most for any year in tournament history.

Anglers registered 578 red drum for Citation awards, which was 11% of awards earned last year. This was a drop from the prior year, but was still the fifth highest number ever. Anglers enjoyed their best cobia and speckled trout fishing in several years, and Citation numbers climbed for both species. A splendid run of big bluefish in coastal waters in December pushed Citation numbers to their highest level since 2001.

A revival of the offshore fishery for swordfish produced 15 Citation awards last year. However, only a handful of boats made overnight trips to catch swordfish and their success rate was spectacular. In December, four or more swordfish were caught by anglers on a single boat at least three separate times.

Citations for sheepshead fell to 288, a 50% drop from the previous year. While the raising of the Citation minimums in 2006 (from 9 lbs. to 10 lbs. and from 22 inches to 24 inches for releases) was a major factor in the decrease in awards, there appeared to be a decline in both availability of big fish and the number of anglers pursuing sheepshead.

Virginia ended the year with three new state records. On March 4th, Clay Armstrong of Mechanicsville captured a 68-lb., 1-oz. striped bass in the Atlantic Ocean off False Cape. The spadefish record was eclipsed twice, first by Michael K. Hanhart of Hudleston with a 13 lb., 5 oz. fish on May 29th at Wolf Trap Light, then by Austin Edwards of Powhatan with a 14-pounder on June 17th at the Cell. The cobia record fell to Joseph F. Berberich II of Hayes for 109 pound fish caught June 10th at York Spit Light.

Forty anglers registered at least six different species of fish for Citation awards and qualified as Virginia Expert Saltwater Anglers. This is the smallest number to qualify since 2000. A list of the anglers earning expert angler status and their catches is attached.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is operated by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission with funding provided by the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing License. Awards are made to anglers catching fish meeting established weight criteria in 23 species. In addition, awards for the catch and release of fish are available in 34 species.

Citation awards are full color certificates delivered at the recipient's choice as a plaque or in a plastic album page. Special awards are presented to anglers meeting the eligibility requirements of the Master Angler and Expert Angler programs.

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